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Richard Kerr Named Acting Director

By RUTH SINAI
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WASHINGTON (AP) - Richard J. Kerr, the deputy director of the CIA, will take over next week as acting director to replace William Webster, who is retiring from government service, the agency said Thursday.

The CIA public affairs office said Kerr will become acting director on Sept. 2, and will serve until a new director is confirmed.

Webster announced his retirement in May and said he would leave the agency at the end of July to go into private law practice. But he extended his service, at the request of President Bush, after the Senate held up confirmation of his designated successor, Robert Gates.

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which was supposed to start its Gates confirmation hearings on July 15, postponed them until September 16 to pursue new information regarding Gates' role in the Iran-Contra affair.

The information stems from testimony by former CIA officer Alan Fiers, who pleaded guilty earlier this month to two misdemeanors in connection with the diversion of Iran arms sales profits to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua.

Fiers said he reported the diversion to three of his superiors, one of whom told him to withhold the information from Congress. During some of that time, Gates was deputy director to William Casey, becoming acting director of the agency in December 1986 when the late CIA chief became too ill with a brain tumor to work. Gates served in that capacity until Webster became agency director in the spring of 1987.

Kerr, 55, became deputy CIA director when Bush named Gates as his deputy national security adviser in January 1989.

It wasn't the first time he had followed in Gates' footsteps. Kerr became the head of the agency's intelligence analysis directorate in April 1986 when Gates was promoted to deputy CIA director.

He was named as a long-shot among potential candidates for the top agency job when Webster announced his retirement in May after four years at the helm.

Kerr hasn't escaped mention in the annals of the Iran-Contra

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scandal, either. Records show that a former CIA analyst, Charles Allen, told Kerr in August 1986 that he suspected Iran was being overcharged for the weapons it was buying from the United States and the profits were being used to arm the Contras.

Kerr told congressional investigators in 1987 that he passed Allen's concerns to Gates, who asked to be kept informed. Gates, according to the report of the congressional Iran-Contra committees, said he didn't remember the conversation with Kerr. Allen subsequently sought out Gates directly in October 1986 and passed on his suspicions, both have testified.

Kerr was born in Fort Smith, Ark., grew up on the West Coast, graduated from the University of Oregon, and joined the CIA in 1960 as a military analyst.

Like Gates, he has served as an analyst of Soviet affairs. He analyzed aerial reconnaissance photos during the Cuban missile crisis in 1963-63, was the CIA liaison with the U.S. Pacific Command and chaired the committee responsible for the requirements and uses of satellite imagery.

In 1976 he was named director of the office responsible for worldwide political analysis.

Kerr is married and has four children. He was among eight senior government officials to whom President Bush awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal on July 3 for their service during the Persian Gulf war.